

Choosing and Using Conventions with Intention

Conventions: The mechanical correctness of a piece of writing, how authors choose to use spelling, grammar, and usage, and how these choices affect us as readers

Conventions are...

- Conventions are the rules of a language. They are the common patterns of grammar, spelling, punctuation, paragraphing and capitalization that readers come to expect in good writing. They make writing easy to read and understand. A reader may not even notice when conventions are well done, but might be distracted from the good ideas that were so carefully planned if the conventions are poorly handled. This is the most mechanical of the six traits and requires writers to learn editing and proofreading skills.

Deliberate Decisions

- Over time, some authors have decided to use conventions in their writing deliberately. For example, some authors capitalize words so that the reader pays special attention, or an author may misspell a word for a significant reason. Whatever the deliberate decision, it is up to the reader to figure out what is indicated by the author's intentional use or misuse.

An Example to Consider

I could set the eggs in the stream so they wouldn't spoil....

Bong. Bong. Bong.

The bell at Christ Church tolled heavily.

"Why is that ringing?" asked Nathaniel. "It's not the hour."

Bong. Bong. Bong.

A little boy sitting on the cobblestones covered his ears. The chattering marketplace voices hushed as the ringing continued. Every face turned toward the bell swaying in its tower.

"Another person dead," said the butcher. He brought his cleaver down, slicing the mutton leg on his table into two pieces. "The bell rings once for each year the person lived," he explained.

-- from *Fever 1793* by Laurie Halse

Anderson

Another Example to Consider

Asha-po was still fighting a grin. “*Alligator*.”

I formed my mind around the syllables. “Al-li-ga-tor.” My Indian friend had taught *me* a word!

Asha-po knew it, too. He pointed to a tree.

“What?” he asked.

“Tree,” I answered. “That...is...tree.”

He splashed at the river. “That...is...water.”

A ray of sunlight broke through the mists surrounding us. We both pointed.

“That is **sun!**” we crowed.

The world expanded like rays of the sun. Simply. Naturally. Truly, the light of understanding is a wondrous, joyful gift.

-- from *Worlds Apart* by

Kathleen Karr

And another example to consider

- We were to be cousins of his and both deaf-mutes – we were to say nothing, and pretend we could hear nothing. This is what happened; simple enough as far as I was concerned since I was unconscious. It had been Beanpole's idea that this would allay suspicion so that, even if they kept us prisoner, they would not put too strong a guard on us, giving us a better chance of escaping when opportunity offered. I do not know if it would have worked – certainly I was in no state to make an escape from anything – but it fell out that things took a very different turn from anything we had envisioned.
- -- from *The White Mountains* by John Christopher

And another example

Well, Sarah Byrnes never did say she was sorry, and I really didn't think she would, but it was the next day, when she really wasn't mad at me anymore, that we began plans for *Crispy Pork Rinds*. And on Friday of that week, right before first period, a copy appeared on the desk of every kid in eighth grade. The headline read:

SIXTEEN YEARS AGO IN HISTORY

*Man with Brain the Size of Tic Tac
Mates with Amoeba*

*Couple gives birth to giant adjusto;
names him Dale*

I didn't equal the level of *National Enquirer* journalism we planned to reach with a little practice, but it was a pretty good start.

-- from *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* by Chris Crutcher

More examples

Of course. My great-grandmother. The Hundred Poems. I know without having to check on the school ports that this poem is not one of them. She took a great risk hiding this paper, and my grandfather and grandmother took a great risk keeping it. What poems could be worth losing everything for?

The very first line stops me in my tracks and brings tears to my eyes and I don't know why except that this one line speaks to me as nothing else ever has.

Do not go gentle into that good night.

I read on, through words I do not understand and ones that I do.

I know why it spoke to Grandfather:

Do not go gentle into that good night,

Old age should burn and rave at close of day;

Rage, rage, against the dying of the light.

And as I read on, I know why it speaks to me:

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,

Because their words had forked no lightning they

Do not go gentle into that good night.

-- from *Matched* by Ally Condie

And another example

“TOM!”

No answer.

“TOM!”

No answer.

“What’s wrong with that boy, I wonder? You TOM!”

No answer.

The old lady pulled her spectacles down and looked over them about the room; then she put them up and looked out under them. She seldom or never looked *through* them for so small a thing as a boy; they were her state pair, the pride of her heart, and were built for “style,” not service – she could have seen through a pair of stove lids just as well.

-- from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain

A final example

About half past nine or ten o'clock he came along the deserted street to where the Adored Unknown lived; he paused a moment; no sound fell upon his listening ear; a candle was casting a dull glow upon the curtain of a second story window. Was the sacred presence there? He climbed the fence, threaded his stealthy way through the plants, till he stood under that window; he looked up at it long, and with emotion; then he laid him down on the ground under it, disposing himself upon his back, with his hands clasped under his breast and holding his poor wilted flower. And thus he would die – out in the cold world, with no shelter over his homeless head, no friendly hand to wipe the death-damps from his brow, no loving face to bend pityingly over him when the great agony came. And thus *she* would see him when she looked out upon the glad morning, and oh! would she drop one little tear upon his poor, lifeless form, would she heave one little sigh to see a bright young life so rudely blighted, so untimely cut down?

-- from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain

Writers as Readers:

Analyzing and Evaluating Text Together

Work together in small groups to identify, analyze, and evaluate the deliberate decisions regarding conventions made by in an excerpt from _____.

Please assume the following roles within the group:

- ★ Reader (read the excerpt aloud)
- ★ Recorder (mark up the text and take notes as group members share their insights)
- ★ Speaker (share results of the discussion)

